

## Construction near for new Dorothy Day Center

By: Brian Johnson January 15, 2015

<http://finance-commerce.com/2015/01/construction-near-for-new-dorothy-day-center/>



*LEFT: Catholic Charities plans to start construction this summer on a new emergency housing project at 411 Main St. in downtown St. Paul. The project site is seen from the north, with Main Street on the left and Interstate 35E on the right. (Staff Photo: Bill Klotz)*

*RIGHT: The new \$40 million "Higher Ground St. Paul" emergency housing project, as seen in this artist's rendering, will provide 278 shelter beds and 178 living units. (Submitted rendering: Cermak Rhoades)*

When Catholic Charities CEO Tim Marx talked about his organization's vision for an ambitious new emergency housing project in St. Paul 10 months ago, he conceded that the plan to break ground in 2015 was "ambitious."

With funding now in place for the \$40 million first phase of the new Dorothy Day Center, that aggressive schedule looks far more realistic. [Catholic Charities](#) is eyeing a summer 2015 start for initial construction at 411 Main St. near the existing center.

Scheduled to wrap up in October 2016, the project will include 278 shelter beds and 193 single-room living units in a five-story building. A second phase with support services and additional housing is also planned, with a total cost of at least \$80 million.

Quick action is important because there's an urgent need for the project, which will replace the overcrowded and deteriorating existing Dorothy Day Center at 183 Old Sixth St. in St. Paul.

"We are motivated to get this up and running as soon as possible," Marx said Thursday.

Catholic Charities hopes to close on financing for the first phase in late spring. The organization has signed a purchase agreement to acquire an existing building at 411 Main St., with plans to tear it down to make way for new construction.

Designed by St. Paul-based Cermak Rhoades, the project's first phase – known as "Higher Ground St. Paul" — is based on the model of Catholic Charities' Higher Ground shelter at 165 Glenwood Ave. in Minneapolis.

Cermak Rhoades also designed the Minneapolis building. Key design elements in the Minneapolis building include natural light and wide open spaces, and the new building will have those same features, Marx said.

Watson-Forsberg is the contractor for the new building.

The new St. Paul facility will replace a 34-year-old Dorothy Day Center that initially served as a "drop-in" place for meals, Catholic Charities said. With homelessness on the rise, it evolved into a full-fledged shelter — something it wasn't designed to be.

Each year, more than 6,000 people rely on the Dorothy Day Center, which has become "overcrowded, overwhelmed, and undignified," Catholic Charities says.

Public funding for the first phase of the new Dorothy Day Center includes \$19 million in [housing bonds](#) financed by the Minnesota Housing Finance Agency and \$6 million in general obligation bonds from the state.

The next order of business: raise more money for the project's second phase.

"We think phase two will be at least another \$40 million," Marx said.

Catholic Charities hoped to get enough money from the 2014 Legislature to start phase two almost concurrently with the first phase. That didn't happen, but the good news is it gave project boosters more time to come up with what Marx believes is a better plan.

As part of phase two, the existing Dorothy Day Center will be demolished and replaced by a new "Connection Center," which will have up to 170 additional housing units and a wide array of support services.

Catholic Charities will request \$12 million from the Legislature this year to help pay for phase two. Earlier this week, the Ramsey County Board approved \$1.7 million for the project.

Ramsey County Board also approved a 10-year, \$20,000-per-year service delivery lease agreement with Catholic Charities.

Ramsey County Commissioner Victoria Reinhardt said at Tuesday's county board [meeting](#) that the county needs facilities like the new Dorothy Day Center to go with its commitment to providing social services.

"I look at this as kind of the old chicken and the egg thing, because in order to make this work so that we can provide the services, we need to have the place to do that," she said. "And in order to have the place to do that and build something you need to know you are going to have somebody in there providing the services."

Alluding to the request for more state funding for the project, Commissioner Rafael Ortega said homelessness is a statewide issue.

"They come here to the metro area, because that is where the resources are," he said. "There has to be more than going every 10 or 15 years to the Legislature and saying, 'We need bonding.' There has to be a long-term vision about, as a state, 'How do we manage this?'"